



BI-WEEKLY HIGHLIGHTS

January 20-February 2, 2008

NOMINATION FOR DIRECTOR OF FOREIGN ASSISTANCE MEMO

- **Journalist Sentenced:** A journalist in Mazar-e-Sharif was recently sentenced to death for supposedly downloading and commenting on Quranic text. The journalist was a participant in a USAID-sponsored international journalism training program in July 2007. According to Tom Casey, Department of State Deputy Spokesman, on January 25: "We are concerned about this sentence that was handed down to a reporter for basically practicing his profession and we wouldn't want to see any actions taken that would limit his or anyone else's freedom of the press or freedom of expression. This is an issue that we are raising with the Afghan Government. I know our Ambassador, Bill Wood, intends to discuss this with officials there and it is something we are going to be watching closely. Now fortunately, I understand there is an appeal process that is underway and certainly, we are going to be looking at that very carefully and hopefully, there will be a different outcome to this than the one that's presently there."
- **Afghans Exhibit Carpets:** USAID's small and medium enterprise development project and the Export Promotion Agency of Afghanistan sent 28 Afghan carpet producers to the Domotex carpet trade show on January 12-15, 2008, in Hanover, Germany. Afghan producers filled much of one of the huge hangers at the fair, with 14 stands and one large tent containing 4,000 square meters of carpets, all of which were sold by the end of the show and generated more than \$5.2 million in export deals. The Best Modern Carpet Design award was presented to Mr. Haji Nabi, owner of Zinnat Carpets. The winning rug, dubbed "Bamiyan" style, is the first "Made in Afghanistan" carpet to reach one of the interior-design industry's center stages in many years. Also for the first time, many Afghan women, including the head of the Afghan Women Business Federation, were present among their country's purveyors.



Afghan traders generated more than \$5.2 million in export deals at the Domotex carpet trade show recently held in Germany.
PHOTO: USAID/ASMED/DAI

SECURITY

- No significant incidents to report



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OFFICE OF ECONOMIC GROWTH

- **Postal Services Expand:** The Afghan Postal Commission issued its seventh license to a private company for the provision of ground parcel post and high-speed international courier services. AES Cargo (a subsidiary of the United Parcel Service/UPS) and Dubai-based Transit Co., Ltd. will initially provide deliveries to the top six urban areas of Afghanistan as part of a USAID-sponsored project to accelerate the development and creation of a competitive playing field for postal services in Afghanistan.



A customer with a copy of his digitized title deed. PHOTO: USAID/LTERA/Emerging Markets Group

- **Land Records Computerized:** Land records in Afghanistan, including property and transfer deeds, were severely damaged during two decades of war. Starting in late 2004, the USAID land titling project began refurbishing the provincial registration courts (Makhzans) and archives of ministries and municipalities in the country. In close coordination with the Kabul Makhzan, the USAID land titling project recently inaugurated the newly reorganized and computerized central land records office which houses a database containing all land records of Makhzans rehabilitated by USAID. The Chief Justice of the Kabul Appeals Court and Supreme Court Justice Baha both

expressed their gratitude for USAID support to land administration in Afghanistan and said they found the assistance to be extremely important.

- **Loan Creates Jobs:** On January 18, the Board of Directors of the Afghanistan Rural Finance Center approved a \$500,000 loan to Surat Zadah Flour Mill in Balkh province. This loan will create more than 160 employment opportunities in the northern region, contribute to regional economic development, and encourage farmers to grow licit crops. Contract farmers in Baghlan, Kunduz, Faryab, Samangan, Balkh, and Jawzjan provinces will use the advance payments to grow wheat to sell to the mill. As of September 2007, USAID's economic growth program has created more than 25,000 jobs through various lending vehicles in the northern region of Afghanistan.



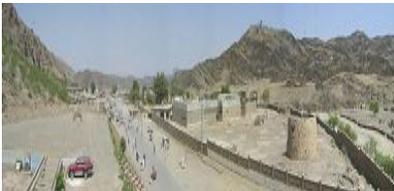
The Surat Zadah Flour Mill in Balkh province will generate 160 employment opportunities due to a \$500,000 loan from the USAID-assisted Afghanistan Rural Finance Center. PHOTO: USAID/ARIES/AED



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- **Financial Services Declared Sharia-compliant:** The eighth Investment and Finance Cooperative (IFC) in Afghanistan was opened in January in Faryab Province. The cooperative has 60 members who have purchased shares and will benefit from a range of financial services. Additionally, four IFCs recently received letters from provincial religious authorities confirming their financial services, including group loans, savings accounts, equipment leasing, debt consolidation loans, and deposits, as legitimate and Sharia-compliant products, strengthening trust between IFCs and their members and adding value to the USAID credit program's effectiveness.
- **Customs Facility Opens:** The customs facility in Torkham, Nangarhar province has been handed over to the Afghan Customs Department thanks to the facilitation of the



Border Facility in December 2005
PHOTO: USAID/BearingPoint



Border Facility in December 2007
PHOTO: USAID/BearingPoint

USAID/Bearing Point customs advisor. The modern European Commission-funded facility is a critical element for instituting

international customs best practices in Afghanistan, generating revenue, and connecting the port of Karachi, Pakistan with the Central Asian Republics.

PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAMS (PRTS)

- **Regaining Bala Baluk:** USAID's local governance and community development program is working with military partners in Farah province following ISAF operations in Bala Baluk and Delaram districts to clear the area last fall. The program is making tangible progress on three reconstruction and development projects in the area, including bazaar construction in the insecure area of Shewan in Bala Baluk district and two road projects. The entire area was heavily influenced by Taliban and other insurgents and for over a year was closed to ISAF forces. Since increased security enabled initiation of the project, locals are more open and willing to work with USAID and the PRT on reconstruction and development projects.
- **Reconstruction in Musa Qaleh:** The USAID representative in Helmand spent much of the week of January 13 in Musa Qaleh assessing the post-conflict situation and laying the groundwork for USAID programming in the contested district. USAID has committed \$2 million in program funding towards efforts in Musa Qaleh and has pledged \$1.5 million in funding to support the Ministry for Rural Reconstruction and Development (MRRD) efforts in the district.



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OFFICE OF ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT AND AGRICULTURE

- **Poultry Industry Expands:** In late December, 23,000 chicks hatched from fertile eggs imported from Avian Technology in the U.S. state of Georgia. These chicks were distributed to 23 men and women farmers in Afghanistan's eastern region by the Spin Ghar Poultry Farms Association. A second hatchery is due to become operational mid-January and orders for more breeders and hatching eggs are expected to arrive during the next few months, laying the foundation for the revival of the poultry industry in eastern Afghanistan.



23,000 chicks hatched in December, laying the foundation for a poultry industry revival in eastern Afghanistan. PHOTO: USAID/ADP-E/DAI

- **Harvest Profits:** Beneficiaries of USAID's alternative development program in the eastern region sold over \$8,200 of cauliflower, cabbage, carrots, and eggplants as well as over \$13,500 in fruit in December. Over 1,000 farmers participated in training on topics such as garden layout, seedling production, harvesting, marketing, and consecutive planting as a means to reduce market risks. One training session hosted by the fruit marketing program in Kunar was covered by local media in order to raise awareness about the impact of the program on farmers' livelihoods.



Training at the Kunar Directorate of Agriculture for new text messaging system distributing market price information. PHOTO: USAID/ADP-E/DAI

- **Texting for Market Prices:** TAMAS, a text messaging system for distributing market price information, was launched in Kunar, Laghman, and Nangarhar provinces. USAID's alternative development team traveled extensively throughout the eastern region raising awareness and providing training on the system; 630 people in eleven districts were trained.
- **Women's Eid Market:** USAID, through its alternative development program, funded and organized a Women's Eid Market with the Department of Women's Affairs during the week before the Eid holiday. This event provided female producers from Faizabad City, Badakshan province, with improved marketing opportunities at



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one of the year's peak sales times. Reported sales for the six participating enterprises exceeded \$1,100, up to 67% more than they would have made in a typical week working from their homes.

- **Saplings Distributed:** USAID's alternative development program distributed over 2,700 saplings to 31 commercial orchard and nursery farmers in the Kishem district of Badakshan. The peach, plum, apricot, and cherry saplings are the first trees planted through the orchard development program in this district and will take 3-5 years to mature.



80% of greenhouse plants survived the recent snow in Herat province. PHOTO: USAID/ADP

- **Plants Survive Snowstorm:** 80% of greenhouse plants survived the recent snow and low temperatures in Herat province, according to a recent survey completed by USAID's agro-enterprise alliance program. USAID is helping farmers to effectively orient their crops to allow sunlight to heat the greenhouses and plants.
- **Public Parks Open in Helmand:** Two public parks in Lashkar Gah recently opened due to the efforts of USAID's alternative development program in Helmand province. Mirwais Nika Park is a leisure riverside park that is next to the new

sports field, Ahmad Shah Baba Park. USAID is scheduled to build three more parks in Lashkar Gah; the Malalai Park designated for women is named after the female Mujahadeen martyr.

- **Road Completed in Helmand:** To facilitate transportation between Afghan Highway 1 and economic clusters in Lashkar Gah, Helmand province, USAID's alternative development program completed a 1.8 km link road connecting the future AgPark and the Bost Airfield.

OFFICE OF DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE

- **Ministries Submit Budgets:** Many months of mentoring, technical support, and training by USAID's capacity development program resulted in the submission of seven ministerial budgets for Afghan fiscal year 1387 based on the government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan's (IRoA) new program budgeting guidelines. For the first time, program



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budgeting will allow the IRoA to compare financial inputs with results achieved on each program of the participating ministries. USAID advisors have also been instrumental in helping ministries increase the rate of budget execution. For example, at the Ministry of Agriculture the execution rate of the development budget this year has improved by over 50% from \$16 million USD spent in 1385 to \$25 million USD in 1386.

OFFICE OF SOCIAL SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

- **Safe Water Solutions:** The USAID-funded social marketing project recently received quality control equipment to ensure reliable production of safe water solutions at Khalid Irshad Pharmaceuticals. This sophisticated quality testing and purification equipment will allow testing of safe water solutions locally under established laboratory standards reviewed and endorsed by the Center for Disease Control and ensures the production of effective chlorine solutions for drinking water and food preparation.
- **Increased Marketing of Health Products:** In early January, the project signed a national distribution agreement for pharmaceutical and contraceptive products with Afghanpharma Distribution Group, who has agreed to promote a line of quality, affordable socially marketed health products as a sign of support to the goals of the Ministry of Public Health. This additional distribution partner will increase the impact of the project's ability to reach more of the underserved and rural communities and thereby increase access to important health products.